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ABSTRACT

Developing nations could greatly improve the quality of life in rural areas by adequately involving women in agricultural extension and training programs. Policy objectives of many developing countries neglect the contributory role of girls and women and often constrain them from seizing opportunities for individual development. In Nigeria, the latent energy of girls and women is being harnessed to improve the general living of the people, and this effort is spurred by current events in the world petroleum market and the economic recession, which add urgency to plans for diversifying the revenue base of the country. There are many steps that developing nations can take to alleviate conditions that have constrained women's productivity in agriculture, while leaving them an enormous burden of work. Rural women should receive education that would help them in gaining independent access to land. Agricultural extension training should be directed toward the specific needs of women. Basic literacy education for rural women should include functional programs in agriculture. Rural schools should teach practical training in agriculture to both boys and girls. Research in agricultural education should be aimed at improving production, processing, and preservation of food and at making the tasks of rural women bearable. (JHZ)

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GENDER AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AREAS
THE RELEVANCE OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

BY

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GENDER AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AREAS: THE RELEVANCE OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT

In a world beset with formidable social and economic developmental obstacles, the plight of the women-folk especially in a developing-country context has been an impressive one. Not only does it seem that policy objectives neglect the contributory role of girls and women, they often are constrained from seizing opportunities for individual developments. The present paper argues that by adequately involving women in agricultural extension and training programs, the contributions of the women-folk would not only be enhanced but the quality of life in the rural area would be improved. The case of women in Nigeria is highlighted where the latent energy of girls and women are being harnessed to improve the general living of the people.

Paper presented at the International Council on Education for Teaching, Thirty-Fourth World Assembly, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, July 20 - 24, 1987.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, like in most developing countries, 60-80 percent of the population reside in the rural areas, and farming is known to be the predominant occupation in the rural areas. Women work side by side with the men to prepare the land, plough, plant, weed, harvest and of course, process and preserve the products either for storage (home use) or for sale. Likewise, it is a known fact that women are the first teachers of the children either through non-formal education as is predominant in the developing countries or by formal education as it operates currently. Yet, due to the skewness in the female education programme in many parts of the developing countries, it is in the rural areas that illiteracy level is higher than in the urban areas and especially so among the rural females. Hence, the major obstacles to female leadership with regards to agricultural development is inherent in the legal rights of women to own land, lack of credit facilities as well as the cultural attitudes of the males that women are subordinate in status in the society as a whole.

This paper examines the prospects for the development of a virile agricultural subsector in Nigeria which will include the women. Current events in the world petroleum market and the recent economic recession have added an urgency to efforts being made by various Women Organisations to diversify the revenue base of the country.

Section II begins with a review of the contributions which Nigerian Rural Women make to economic development.

Section III discusses some of the problems of the Nigerian Rural Economy and this is related to agricultural performance over the last decade. Section IV examined female education aspirations and Section V concludes the paper.

II. Contribution by Nigerian Rural Women to Economic Development

Patel and Anthonio (1973) in a study of the socio-economic activities of the wives of tobacco farmers in Oshun and Oyo, South-Western, Nigeria found that:

(i) contrary to the opinion that Yoruba women do little farm work, 93 percent of the women studied were actively engaged in the farming of crops such as yams, maize, tobacco and cassava.

(ii) women were not allowed to participate in farm activities that were considered difficult such as bush clearing, preparing land for planting and weeding.

(iii) the women were observed to be involved in decision making because 64 percent of the women "helped to find new ideas for improving crops and livestock", 48 percent of them indicated that they encouraged their husbands to continue with new ideas believed to be sound or reject new ideas that were not so sound.

(iv) the women had limited opportunities compared to men, to contact extension agents who were men and whose services were geared towards men farmers in any case.

(v) approximately 80 percent of these women helped their husbands financially for agricultural purposes. Therefore, the women studied (Patel and Anthonio, 1973) contributed to the economic development of that particular environment through their active participation as well as their financial support.

In the Yorubaland in particular, women are observed to dominate the retail marketing of agricultural commodities. It was found that in the rural markets, men constituted less than 5 percent of the traders, while in the urban markets, the women outnumber the men in the retail market (Adekanye, 1981). Due to better financial capabilities, men were found to feature prominently in the wholesale market. The explanation given for the predominance of Yoruba women in domestic commodity marketing are that trading was regarded as:

(i) a means of making money that would be used to augment family income;

(ii) a profession handed down to female members by previous generation;

(iii) a profession that required very little specialised skill;

(iv) a lack of alternative renumerative employment;

(v) a profession that is befitting to the polygamous system of marriage;

(vi) a profession that has relative ease of entry.

The listed reasons confirm that Yoruba women in general have always worked outside the home even when their children are relatively young. That is to say, that Yoruba women have always been industrious in their approach and have been actively involved in the financial contribution towards raising a family. Therefore, the women have often looked for gainful employment outside the home for their upkeep and for those of their children. Furthermore, the popularity of trading among Yoruba women have been traced to the inter-tribal wars which plagued the Yorubaland before the end of the nineteenth century, (Adekanye, 1970; Hodder and Ukwu, 1966). It was unsafe for men to move about freely, but the women were safe to carry on their trading on a neutral space between the warring factions.

In addition to the marketing of agricultural products, Nigerian Rural Women have made considerable contributions to the economy particularly as food producers and processors. The income generating contributions of the Nigerian Rural Women in different parts of the country have been documented.

For example, Adekanye (1981) wrote that the Ibo women in Southeastern Nigerian are important in farming food crops similarly, the Hausa-Fulani women in purdah in the Northern States are involved in food processing in the confines of the family compound. Also a large number of rural dwellers especially in the riverine areas of Nigeria's coastal regions make their living from fisheries and forestry. Adekanye (1983) and Williams (1984 and 1985) reported in their studies on the fishery economy and the contributory roles of the Nigerian Women that while the men were mainly involved in catching the fish from the wild, the women were actively involved in the processing, preservation and marketing of the fishes caught by the men. The small-scale fish industry in the riverine areas therefore constituted a form of family cottage industry in which the active participation of the fishermen's wives helped to stabilize prices, reduce the tendency of the middlemen from colluding the economic profits and thus increase pricing efficiency. On the overall, the Nigerian Rural Women, regardless of which ethnic group they belong to are vital to the economic development of thecountry.

Several authors have stated categorically that the Nigerian agricultural sector is in a mess (Olayide, 1977; Idachaba, 1984; Anthonio 1984). Tables 1 and 2 gives a clear picture of the status of imports and exports between 1981 and 1983.

Table 1: Nigeria's Commodity Imports Between 1981 and 1983 (Million of Naira)

	1981	1982	1983
Food	1,820.2	1,642.2	1,176.7
Beverages and Tobacco	16.5	16.4	13.1
Animal and Vegetable oils	128.7	151.4	105.6
Manufactured goods	2,540.7	2,137.1	1,337.9
Chemicals	1,220.4	981.6	714.0
Machinery and Transport Equipment	5,548.1	4,169.9	2,145.2
Miscellaneous Manufactured goods	947.7	642.3	316.6
Miscellaneous Transactions	10.2	36.6	41.1
Total	12,232.5	9,977.5	5,850.2

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Economic and Financial Review, Vol. 23, No. 1, March 1985.

Table 2: Nigeria's Value of Major Exports Between 1981 and 1983 (Millions of Naira)

	1981	1982	1983
Cocoa	172.9	150.1	232.4
Palm Kernels	13.8	3.7	11.6
Petroleum (crude)	10,665.7	8,709.2	7,024.4
Tin metal	12.4	10.5	1.3
Other commodities	134.0	313.5	198.6
Total	11,000.9	9,188.6	7,471.8

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Economic and Financial Review, Vol. 23, No. 1, March 1985.

III. Nigeria's Farm Problems with Reference to Nigerian Women in Agriculture

Research findings (Igbozurike, 1978) indicated that one of the basic problems in agricultural development in Nigeria was that of land fragmentation. Adekanye (1981, 1986) reported that small farms of less than six hectares were responsible for the production of 90 per cent of all farm output in Nigeria. In addition, relating Nigeria's population to its land area, agriculture and economic development, it was observed that there is a problem in the low land area that is related to availability of land for agricultural development especially in the Southern region (Oluwasanmi, 1966).

Also, as earlier stated, the rural population is engaged primarily in farming, thus, it is reported in research findings that rural farm labour is too high and that the associated problems with labour use in agriculture include ageing farmers (women especially) seasonal and expensive nature of hired labour, high ratio of illiterate and unskilled labour involved in rural agri-business to name a few.

Therefore, the result was that the food economy was subsistence because the quantity of food produced per farmer was low. The farmer, his wife and their resources could only produce food items to satisfy the family to begin with, thereby causing deficits for most food items needed in the market place. With the discovery of petroleum and industrialization of the country, there was a mass rural-urban migration.

The implication of such rural-urban migration is deficit in farm labour, high demand especially in the urban areas for farm produce resulting in huge food deficit that became reflected in the high magnitude of food imports as recorded by the high food import bills for Nigeria for the past several years. The conclusion that the Nigerian women in agriculture are limited in their ability to improve the situation because they lack the legal rights to farm lands in the rural areas, they lack credit facilities to expand their farming enterprise, they lack the educational base in science, technology and agricultural extension to mobilize the rural women in improving farming to the extent that will make the impact needed to improve the rural economy. There is no doubt though that the Nigerian women in Agriculture are a force to reckon with and that they have an important role to play in bringing about a turn-around in the present economic recession that Nigeria and other developing countries are experiencing in the eighties.

IV. Female Education Aspirations

The family structure play an important role on the individual members of the family. This is translated to mean that the family performs certain functions such as provision of economic support for members of the family child rearing which includes educational and religious upbringing, replacement of clan system and emotional support.

An in-depth analysis of family characteristics and female educational aspirations in Oyo State Secondary Schools in Nigeria, indicated that a high percentage of the parents who are farmers, had no formal education. Since parental occupation were found to be positively related that children whose parents are farmers should receive education with a curricula content that includes agricultural science, agricultural designs and technology, agricultural extension (young farmers club), agricultural cooperatives at all levels of the educational system. Such an education of farmers' offsprings will help them with practical suggestions at home. Also, it will form a basis for the child's career orientation. For example, young farmer's club if encouraged in the school system will foster friendship among the children and it is an adoption tool for the fostering of an innovative farmer with an innate quality for the designing of farm equipment and designs that can be employed in making the present traditional farm tools such as hoes, cutlasses, watering cans, etc. to be more efficient and productive. Some of these children if they are spotted as quite talented could be encouraged by awarding them scholarships that will enable them attend School, Colleges or Vocational Institutions to develop such talents for the designing of farm tools for future agricultural use in the rural areas, then one can begin to look into the future with hope.

Children, especially, females that have participated in school activities such as young farmer's club, etc. could be

encouraged and counselled to take academic and/or technical subjects that would enhance her educational developments such that she can take up a career oriented to the area of farm extension work. This is an area that is of significance to the rural women. Male extension workers are not interested in female oriented techniques. In some areas, male extension workers cannot make personal contacts with the female residents. This is due to some of the religious beliefs or taboos.

V. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has focussed on the role women play in development especially in rural areas. Bearing in mind the previous discussions, it is now clear that there are many factors which constrained women's productivity in agriculture, while leaving to her an enourmous burden of work. To enhance the important role of women in the rural areas it is suggested that:

(i) adequate provision should be made whereby education can be given to women in the rural areas to aid them in gaining independent access to land;

(ii) training should be given to women in Agricultural Extension, and focussing more on extension training for women so as to improve their agricultural production, etc.;

(iii) basic literacy programmes for adult women should include functional programmes in agriculture;

(iv) school curriculum in rural areas should include practical training in agricultural science, agricultural designs, technology, agricultural extension, agricultural cooperatives and the subjects should be taught to both boys and girls;

(v) direction of research in agricultural education should be to improve production, processing and preservation of food items and make the tasks of the rural women bearable;

(vi) with the acceptance of the "Blue Print" on Women Education in Nigeria by the Federal Government, personnels in the Federal and State Ministries of Education in charge of Women Education Units should be women so that the policies formulated in the "Blue Print" would be followed through and implemented.

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